Chapter 2
The Cham Civilization and Its People—An Overview of Bhum Cham

Introduction

Vietnam is a culturally diverse country, bordered by Cambodia to the southwest, the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (PDR) to the northwest, and China to the north. According to the General Statistics Office (2019), the Vietnamese population was 85.8 million in 2009 and is made up of 54 ethnic groups. These groups are classified by language, with three main language families: Sino-Tibetan, Austroasiatic, and Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) (General Statistics Office, 2019). The Kinh people, the largest ethnic group, make up 85.7% of the population while the other 53 ethnic groups together account for 14.3% of the total population (General Statistics Office, 2019). The Kinh, Hoa (Chinese), Khmer, and Cham predominantly live in the lowlands, while the other ethnic groups reside in the highlands stretching north to south throughout the entire western part of the country. A significant number of Kinh people now also reside in the highlands of certain provinces. This chapter focuses on the Cham community, and their civilization. Each ethnic group contributes to the cultural diversity of Vietnam and plays an important role in shaping the country's cultural landscape.

The Cham People and the Civilization of Champā

Clarifying the Terminology: Understanding the Concept of Indigenous People in Different Contexts

Indigenous peoples are known by various names across different countries, such as tribes, first peoples, aborigines, ethnic groups, or ethnic minorities. In some Asian nations, despite the use of the term "Indigenous" by the groups themselves, state

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authorities prefer to use the terms "ethnic groups" or "ethnic minorities" (Corntassel, 2003; Merlan, 2009).

In Vietnam, the term "Indigenous" is not officially recognized by the government. Instead, the Vietnamese government prefers to refer to Indigenous peoples as "ethnic minorities" (dân tộc thiểu số or dân tộc ít ngư`ơi) (IWGIA, 2012). The use of the term "Indigenous peoples" (ngư`ơi bản địa) is not widely accepted in official documents and public discourse. However, the government is considering the use of the term "tộc ngư`ơi tại chỗ," which has a similar meaning to "Indigenous," but does not fully encompass the concept of "Indigeneity." The government defines Indigenous groups as those individuals who have Vietnamese nationality and live in the country, but do not share the same language, culture, or identity as the majority group, the Kinh (IWGIA, 2012). As a result, the Kinh are considered the majority group, while the other 53 cultural and ethnic groups in the country are considered ethnic minorities.

Despite the fact that many Indigenous communities in Vietnam acknowledge their ancestral connections to their lands, their understanding and reference to the international discourse on Indigenous identity and related definitions is limited, due to a lack of access to this information (IWGIA, 2012).

Despite this, however, the use of the term "Indigenous" by international organizations and researchers is not necessarily recognized by the Vietnamese government. According to the government's definition, Indigenous groups are defined as those who have Vietnamese nationality and do not share the same characteristics as the Kinh majority group in terms of language, culture, and identity (IWGIA, 2012). This means that the term "Indigenous" as used by international organizations and scholars may not be in line with the official stance of the Vietnamese government.

Furthermore, while some Indigenous groups in Vietnam have been able to access the international discourse on Indigenousness, the majority of these groups have not yet been exposed to these definitions and discussions (IWGIA, 2012). This lack of exposure means that the use of the term "Indigenous" by international organizations and scholars may not be fully understood or appreciated by the Indigenous groups themselves.

In conclusion, the use of the term "Indigenous" in Vietnam is a complex issue that is influenced by a range of factors including the views of international organizations and scholars, the stance of the Vietnamese government, and the level of exposure of Indigenous groups to the international discourse on Indigenousness.

In this study, the author has analyzed and acknowledged the policies and initiatives of the Vietnamese government aimed at preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of the country's 54 ethnic groups. The term "Indigenous peoples" used in this study does not carry any political implications or connotations, but rather highlights the long-standing existence of communities that have created, maintained, and passed down cultural heritage from generation to generation. This longevity of cultural tradition highlights the element of living heritage that is being sustained by the community as cultural bearers.

Throughout the study, the term "Indigenous people" is used to align with the terminology used by contemporary scholars of Vietnam, as well as to align the

case study of heritage preservation in Vietnam with other Indigenous communities around the world. However, the term may also be used interchangeably with "ethnic minority" at times.

The Civilization of Champā

The civilization of Champā had a significant impact on the history of Vietnam. The Chamic-speaking peoples are believed to have migrated from Borneo to Central Vietnam between 2,000 and 3,000 years ago and mixed with the local Indigenous population along the coast and highlands, eventually settling in the region and establishing the foundations of the civilization of Champā (Dharma, 1999). This civilization covered an area that stretched from south of the Ngang Pass (currently Quang Binh Province) to the Dong Nai River, including both the coastal plains and the interior highlands of Central Vietnam (Fig. 2.1) (LaFont, 2014; Momoki, 1999).

Historic Champā was comprised of five polities, which changed status from principalities to independent kingdoms, depending on the historical period (Dharma, 1978; Lafont, 2014). These polities were Indrapura, Amaravati, Vijaya, Kauthara, and Panduranga, each with its own autonomous political institution and the ability to secede from the federal kingdom and become a separate independent kingdom (Dharma, 1999; LaFont, 2014; Momoki, 2011).

In the tenth century, Champā faced challenges from the Dai Viet state, leading to the eventual decline of the civilization's political prominence (Brossard, 1901; Li, 1998; Phat, 1970; Taylor, 1983). The Dai Viet state, which had gained independence from China, was focused on reconstructing and organizing its economy and society and saw the conquest of Champā as a means to increase its power. In 1832, after centuries of struggle, the last Champā kingdom, Panduranga, fell and became a part of the Dai Viet state, which later became what is now known as Vietnam (Dharma, 1999, p. 31; Lafont, 2014, p. 210).

This map showcases the shifting borders of the Champā civilization over time and provides a visual representation of the different polities that existed within its confines, including Indrapura, Amaravati, Vijaya, Kauthara, and Panduranga. The map provides valuable insight into the evolution and geographical extent of the Champā civilization, helping to better understand its rich cultural heritage and historical significance.

Over the course of the last eighteen centuries, the Cham community has established a distinct cultural identity by creatively incorporating elements of Hinduism and Islam into their preexisting religious and cultural traditions. This process of localization and selective adaptation has resulted in a unique fusion of different beliefs and practices (Biên et al., 1991; Lafont, 2014; Mus, 1934; Sakaya, 2003).

Fig. 2.1 Map of the historical frontiers of Champā, showcasing its principalities and kingdoms in uppercase (Po Dharma, 2001)

Peoples and Languages of Champā

The Champā civilization was composed of two language family groups: Austronesian and Austroasiatic (Dharma, 1999; Lafont, 2014; Lockhart, 2011; Thurgood, 1999). According to Cham folklore, the kingdom of Champā was ruled by two clans: the Areca Clan, also known as the Pinang clan in the Cham language, who descended from mountain people (Atuw Cek) and held control over the northern region, and the Coconut Clan, referred to as the Li-u clan in the Cham language, who descended from sea people (Atuw Tasik) and governed the southern region (Maspero, 1928, p. 23; Phuong, 2008, p. 6).

The Cham people are widely distributed throughout Southern Vietnam, with a population of around 160,000 (General Statistics Office, 2019). They are grouped into three main communities based on their location in Vietnam:

1. Central Vietnam Cham—This community shows cultural similarities to the cultures of ethnic minorities in the uplands of Vietnam, as well as many cultural features that were once present in the lowlands of Champā (Lafont, 2014).
2. Southern Central Cham—This is the largest Cham community in Vietnam and is concentrated in southern central regions (General Statistics Office, 2019).
3. South-western Vietnam Cham—This community, largely made up of followers of Islam, is the last major Cham community in South Vietnam, with similar origins to the Panduranga Cham (Biên, et al., 1991; Lafont, 2014; Mus, 1934; Sakaya, 2003).

These communities have maintained a distinct cultural identity despite centuries of southern expansion by the Vietnamese, and they continue to preserve their traditions, beliefs, and language (Dharma, 1999; Lockhart, 2011; Thurgood, 1999).

The Champā civilization had early contact with South Asian civilizations, and as a result, became familiar with South Asian languages, literature, and cultural elements from an early time (Lafont, 2014; Phan, 2012). This is evident in the characteristic use of Champā stone inscriptions to narrate events from the dynasty and to praise the gods and the kings' predecessors. From the fifteenth century onwards, the Cham people began to increasingly use other materials, such as paper, bamboo, cloth, leather, and palm leaves, to write in the Akhar Thrah writing system (Phan, 2012; Sakaya, 2016a).

Despite the rich cultural heritage of the Cham people, younger generations struggle to express themselves in their mother tongue or to write in Cham script (Hao, 2015; Phan, 2012). This highlights the significance of preserving physical heritage sites as a means to connect to the past. To address this issue, the Committee for Drafting School Textbooks in the Cham Language (Ban Biên Soạn Sách Chữ Chăm) was established with the goal of creating textbooks and overseeing education for Cham children in primary schools. The committee currently supervises over 150 primary schools and more than 5,000 Cham children (Dharma, 2001). After a decade of operation, the committee has published five textbooks for students from Classes 1 to 5, as well as for Po Klaong Girai High School. This initiative has helped Cham children learn to read and write in their native language.

The committee has received support from both national and international institutions, including the Centre d'Histoire et Civilisations de la Péninsule Indochinoise (CHCPI), which is part of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sorbonne, Paris, 4th Section). The CHCPI has provided technical support, including software in Cham characters, to help publish additional textbooks on Cham stories, legends, history, culture, and customs (Dharma, 2001). Despite these efforts, many challenges still remain, primarily due to a lack of financial support (Dharma, 2001). Nevertheless, the state and local authorities continue to work towards preserving and promoting the intangible cultural heritage of the Cham people.

Preserving the Legacy: Ancient Monuments of the Champā Civilization

The remnants of the Champā civilization, scattered throughout the central plains and uplands of Vietnam, demonstrate the wealth, power, and sophistication that once characterized the civilization (Hubert, 2012; Tieu et al., 2000; Momoki, 1999; Phuong, 2009; Shigeeda, 1994; Sox, 1972; Stern, 1942). In this research, the focus is on the Champā temples, particularly those that continue to hold significance for the contemporary Cham population.

Temples and temple-tower complexes: The 19 standing temple groups, ranging from Quang Tri Province to Binh Thuan Province in central coast and uplands of Vietnam, are estimated to have been built from the 7th to the sixteenth centuries (Doanh, 2006; Luu Tran Tieu et al., 2000). Henri Parmentier's early 20th-century French documentation of Cham ruins is the earliest known international academic source on Cham heritage sites (Hardy et al., 2009). Parmentier's study found that the Champā people constructed numerous Hindu and Buddhist temples that displayed sophisticated architectural techniques. Some of the notable surviving Cham temples in the region include Mỹ Sơn, Đồng Dương, Po Inâ Nâgar, Dương Long, and Yang Praong, in addition to numerous isolated sculptures made of sandstone and metal alloys (Fig. 2.2).

The Cham Community in Ninh Thuan Province

The Cham community in Ninh Thuan Province represents a significant concentration of Cham people who have maintained strong connections to their cultural heritage and the legacy of Champā. This section provides an overview of the region, including its geography and history, as well as a detailed description of the Cham population in Ninh Thuan Province and their unique cultural heritage.

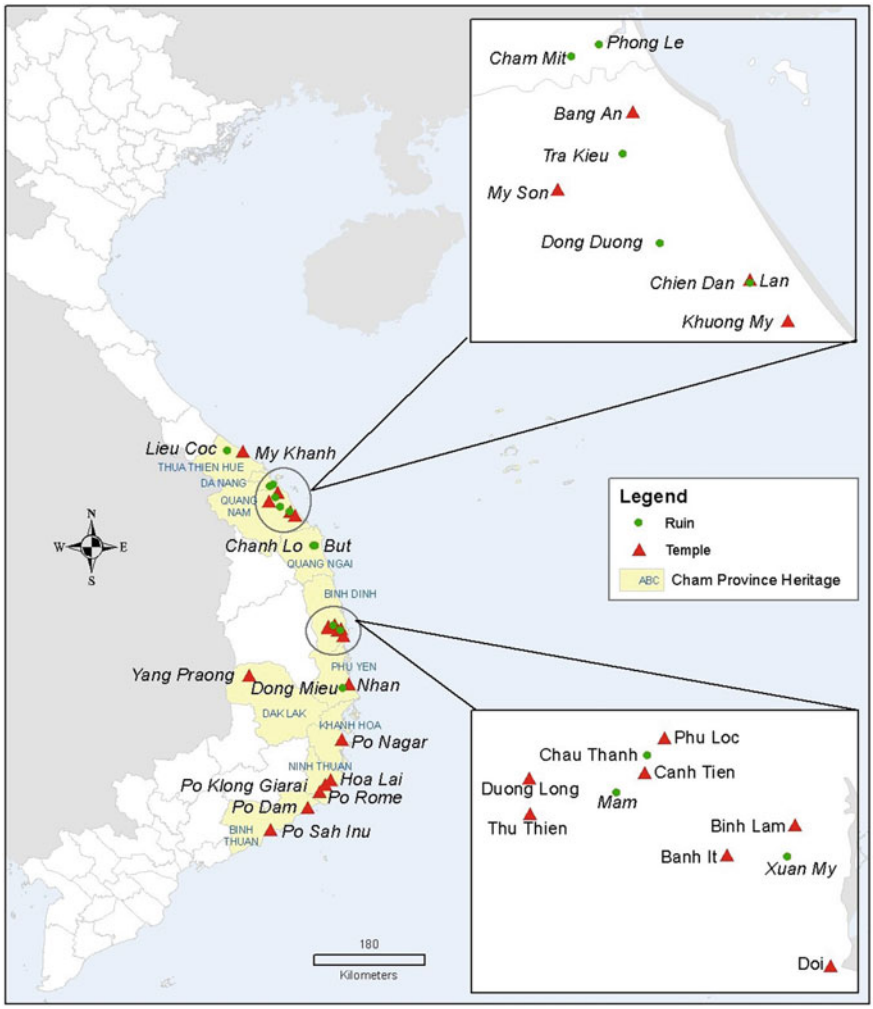

Fig. 2.2 The distribution of Champā remains in Vietnam

The Geography of Ninh Thuan Province

Ninh Thuan Province is situated in the South Central Coast region of Vietnam and is bordered by the South China Sea to the east, Binh Thuan Province to the south, Khanh Hoa Province to the southeast, and Binh Dinh Province to the northwest. The province covers an area of approximately 8,000 square kilometers and has a population of around 800,000 inhabitants. The geography of Ninh Thuan Province is diverse, featuring mountainous terrain, sandy beaches, and fertile plains. It is

renowned for its abundant and varied natural resources including forests, minerals, and agricultural land.

Located on the coast of South-Central Vietnam, Ninh Thuan Province is protected by mountains and sheltered from wind, except for its eastern part that faces the sea (Fig. 2.3). The region has a tropical climate, marked by monsoon seasons, with the majority of rainfall occurring in September and October. The average annual temperature is 26–27 °C, while average rainfall ranges from 700 to 800 mm in Phan Rang to 1,100 mm in the mountains, with relative humidity hovering around 75–77% (General Statistics Office, 2019, p. 7).

The ecology of Ninh Thuan Province includes several riverine systems, including the Cai River or Dinh River and its tributaries, and the La and Quao Rivers. Due to the arid climate in the region, the residents of Ninh Thuan have a strong dependence on natural phenomena for their survival, leading to the development of an agricultural-based belief system with intricate layers of ritual practices. This belief system is closely tied to the cycles of the rice harvest, including fertility rites, prayers for rain, the opening of dams, and animal sacrifices. The gods are believed to have the power to control the success of the crops, natural phenomena such as natural disasters and enemy-inflicted disasters, and thus, the farmers in Ninh Thuan believe that prayer to these natural gods will bring favorable weather conditions for a successful harvest despite the harsh conditions of the Panduranga region, which is characterized by limited rainfall but abundant sunshine.

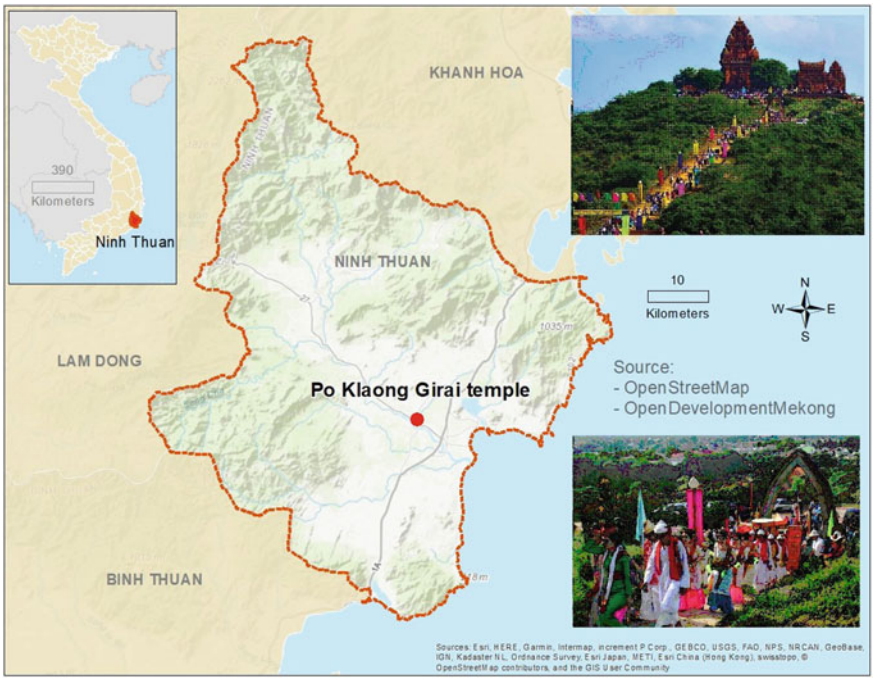

Fig. 2.3 Map of Ninh Thuan Province and the location of Po Klaong Girai temple

Champā in Ninh Thuan Province

Ninh Thuan Province is situated in the northern half of the ancient kingdom of Champā, specifically in the Panduranga region. This area is considered an ideal location for studying Cham history and society due to its preservation of numerous Cham manuscripts, knowledgeable Cham intellectuals, and traditional Cham cultural practices (Dharma, 1987, 1999; Abdul, 2013, p. 13).

Although records of Panduranga are scarce, it has been mentioned in several historical documents from the sixteenth century, including in a dispute between two factions of the Nguyen and Trinh clans of the Viet/Kinh people (Khoang, 1969; Kim, 1986; T. Li, 1998). This demonstrates the significance of Panduranga in Cham history and its relevance to the broader Southeast Asian region.

The Cham in this region were followers of Le Van Duyet, who battled against Minh Mang and the Nguyen Dynasty. In 1832, after the death of Le Van Duyet, Minh Mang took back the land and punished those who had followed him, leading to the brutal slaughter of many Cham people. Despite subsequent attempts at independence, including the Islamic movement of Katip Sumat (1833–1834) and the revolt of Ja Thak Wa (1834–1835), all efforts failed and the kingdom of Champā was eventually conquered by the Nguyen Dynasty (Dharma, 1987, 1999). Today, Ninh Thuan remains the greatest repository of evidence about the last kingdom of Champā and its rich history, with a wealth of cultural heritage still evident in its ancient architecture, inscriptions, and religious practices (Bien et al., 1989; Bien et al., 1991; Doanh, 1998; Dop et al., 2014).

Cham Heritage in Ninh Thuan: Living Cultural Landscapes

The Cham in Ninh Thuan Province retain a distinct cultural identity through the preservation of traditional practices such as arts, rituals, festivals, ceremonies, religion, customary law, language, and literature (Dop et al., 2014; Phan, 1996). The Cham communities, known as palei, are organized around a matrilocal kinship network, where ancestor veneration is emphasized on the mother's side of the family and property inheritance is passed down through the youngest daughter. Women hold significant power within the family, with the oldest female serving as the head of the household. Men, on the other hand, primarily work as laborers and hold little power within the family. Historically, only priests and clerics held significant influence, but the intelligentsia has gained power since the mid-twentieth century (Noseworthy, 2017).

The Cham people in Ninh Thuan Province practice a diverse array of religious beliefs, with two major denominations being the Ahier, an Indigenous form of Hinduism, and the Awal, an Indigenous form of Islam. While a small number of Awal have been converted to traditional Islam, other beliefs such as polytheism and

Christianity (mainly Protestantism) are present in smaller numbers (Noseworthy, 2017).

Interestingly, Buddhism, which was once an influential religion in the region and demonstrated a crucial center for Buddhist studies in Southeast Asia since the seventh century, is no longer practiced by the Cham community (Phu, 2012; Schweyer, 2009; Van Son, 2014). Nevertheless, several architectural arts from the Champā era, indicative of its important role in Buddhist studies, still remain in Central Vietnam.

In addition, the Cham community also holds a strong tradition of oral storytelling, passed down through generations, which is used to preserve the history and culture of their people (Phan, 1996). This oral tradition is an important part of the Cham cultural heritage and is still highly valued and practiced today. Furthermore, the Cham people have a rich tradition of traditional festivals and ceremonies, such as the Kate Festival, the Cambun Festival, and the Rija Nagar Festival, which are celebrated annually to commemorate important events in Cham history, to pray for good health and prosperity, and to mark the changing of the seasons (Phan, 2010; Sakaya, 2003). These festivals and ceremonies provide a platform for the Cham to express their cultural identity, to preserve their traditions, and to maintain their spiritual connection to their ancestors and their cultural heritage.

The Cham community in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan retains its traditional classes of Halau Janâng (the system of priests) and Gihéh (the laity), despite the significant changes that the community has experienced throughout history (Phan, 2010). The Cham people have established rich cultural arts, including sculpture, architecture, music, and dance, that reflect their unique identity and express their thoughts, emotions, and aesthetic views (Bien et al., 1991; Dop et al., 2014; Sakaya, 2003). Their folklore across various genres and myths also showcases their distinct cultural heritage. Although influences from South and other Southeast Asian cultures can be seen, the Cham have managed to preserve their own identity (Phan, 1996).

Religious communities in the Cham community usually reside in separate palei, but some may live together in the same village (Hieu, 2013; Phan, 1996). The two major religious groups among the Cham are the Ahier (an indigenized form of Hinduism) and the Awal (an indigenized form of Islam), with a small number of Awal having been converted to traditional Islam. Other denominations, such as polytheism and Christianity (mainly Protestantism), are in the minority (Phan, 1996).

The Cham custodians play an important role in managing natural resources, religion, and culture. They provide direct management and protection of sacred sites, such as temples, shrines, and Kut graves, or support for those who do (Phan, 1996). The preservation of the Cham community's heritage is also supported by the matrilocal kinship network, where the youngest daughter inherits property, the oldest female in each generation is the head of the household, and the duty to preserve religious sites is passed down along matrilineal lines (Noseworthy, 2017).

Cham communities have two main types of custodians derived from within the community: priests and knowledgeable elders. The priests directly perform ceremonies and manage sacred sites and natural resources, while the elders assist in carrying out ceremonies and providing guidance to the community (Phan, 1996). These two groups are critical in maintaining the spiritual and cultural heritage of the

Cham people. The rituals that take place in the temples are for the wider membership of the communities, while those in the village palei are more focused on individual families or clans (Hieu, 2013). Hence, both the priests and all social classes in the Cham community are responsible for preserving and protecting their natural resources and sacred sites, which are essential for their daily lives and spiritual practices.

The Cham people's rich history and culture have often been viewed by Vietnamese officials as distinct and more advanced compared to other minority groups in the country. However, there is a need to further explore and understand the Cham community, including their cultural beliefs, practices, and misunderstandings.

In conclusion, this chapter highlights the cultural, religious, and social aspects of the Cham people in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan Provinces in Vietnam. The Cham have a distinct identity that is reflected in their traditional practices, arts, and culture. They have two major religious groups, Ahier and Awal, with influences from South and Southeast Asian cultures visible in their folklore, music, dance, and sculpture. Despite the changes that the Cham have experienced in their history, the basic classes of traditional society still exist in the Cham communities, with custodians playing a significant role in managing natural resources, religion, and culture. The ceremonies in the temples are for the wider community while those in the village palei are for each family or clan. The development of the Cham kingdoms and people is viewed as advanced by Vietnamese officials, but this view may not be entirely accurate.

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